

Cambridge University Press  
0521843006 - The French Actress and her English Audience  
John Stokes  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## THE FRENCH ACTRESS AND HER ENGLISH AUDIENCE

For centuries English and French theatrical conventions have had an uneasy relationship with one another: mutual admiration, mutual envy, mutual distrust. Just as the fascination of difference lies in the potential for sameness, so these opposed traditions have observed each other at close quarters and invited each other back home. In an unusually detailed and carefully illustrated book, John Stokes explores the reception of the French actress by English audiences from the early nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth – a period when the relationship between England and France was transformed and re-defined. Mlle Mars, Sarah Bernhardt and Edwige Feuillère are among the many actresses invoked; prominent English spectators include William Hazlitt, Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde. The result is a vivid coming together of theatre history and cultural studies that will appeal to scholars of English and French literature as well as to students of acting.

JOHN STOKES teaches at King's College London where he specialises in the history of drama. He is a regular contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement* and other journals. His previous books include *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles and Imitations* (1996), and, with Michael Booth and Susan Bassnett, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse: The Actress in Her Time* (1988) and *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori* (1996), all published by Cambridge University Press.

Cambridge University Press  
0521843006 - The French Actress and her English Audience  
John Stokes  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

THE FRENCH ACTRESS  
AND HER ENGLISH  
AUDIENCE

JOHN STOKES



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
0521843006 - The French Actress and her English Audience  
John Stokes  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© John Stokes 2005

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt.    *System* L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub> [T<sub>B</sub>]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

ISBN 0 521 84300 6 hardback

Cambridge University Press  
0521843006 - The French Actress and her English Audience  
John Stokes  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

For Peter and Valerie Mendes  
*Oh, les beaux jours*

## *Contents*

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction: the golden age of acting	1
1 Mademoiselle Mars, the English and romantic love	25
2 Rachel's 'terrible beauty': an actress among the novelists	46
3 Memories of Plessy: Henry James restages the past	64
4 Déjazet/déjà vu	82
5 The modernity of Aimée Desclée	99
6 'A kind of beauty': Réjane in London	119
7 Peacocks and pearls: Oscar Wilde and Sarah Bernhardt	138
8 The greatest actress in the world: Edwige Feuillère and her admirers	159
<i>Notes</i>	180
<i>Select bibliography</i>	209
<i>Index</i>	219

## *Illustrations*

1	Drian, 'Mlle Cécile Sorel as Célimène' ( <i>The Sketch</i> , 28 May 1924)	page 20
2	Mlle Mars as Elmire in <i>Tartuffe</i> c. 1815	26
3	Rachel as Phèdre	47
4	Madame Plessy as Emma in <i>La Fille D'Honneur</i> c. 1835	65
5	Virginie Déjazet by Nadar c. 1865	84
6	'Déjazet: Scene from the <i>Marquis de Lauzan</i> ' ( <i>Illustrated London News</i> , 21 February 1852)	92
7	Déjazet as Monsieur Garat	97
8	Aimée Desclée	100
9	Gabrielle Réjane by Downey c. 1895	120
10	Toulouse-Lautrec, 'Réjane and Galipaux in <i>Mme. Sans-Gêne</i> , 1894'	127
11	Aubrey Beardsley, 'Portrait of Madame Réjane' from the second number of <i>The Yellow Book</i> , 1894	129
12	Aubrey Beardsley, 'Madame Réjane'	130
13	Sarah Bernhardt	139
14	'The Comédie Française at the Gaiety: <i>Hernani</i> ' ( <i>Illustrated London News</i> , 21 June 1879)	150
15	Toulouse-Lautrec, 'Oscar Wilde', 1896 (detail)	151
16	Toulouse-Lautrec, 'Sarah Bernhardt as Cleopatra', 1898	152
17	Sarah Bernhardt listening to her own voice in the Bettini Recording Laboratory, NY	155
18	Sarah Bernhardt in <i>Queen Elizabeth</i>	157
19	Edwige Feuillère	160
20	Jean-Louis Barrault and Edwige Feuillère in <i>Partage de Midi</i>	164

## *Acknowledgements*

I have been fortunate, first at the University of Warwick and more recently at King's College London, to work with people who share my fascination with the theory and practice of performance. I have learned from them all. Four friends I first encountered when they were graduate students have greatly enhanced my understanding of the history of the actress. They are Elaine Aston, Maggie Gale, Gail Marshall and Joanna Robinson.

Over the years librarians in London and Paris have been unfailingly helpful but I should mention, in particular, the staff in the Study Room at the Theatre Museum for whom nothing theatrical is too much trouble.

Jane Sacchi generously gave me access to papers relating to her late mother, the actress Margaret Rawlings. Rosemary Geddes has kindly approved my use of a letter from the late Sir Alan Bates.

At Cambridge University Press, Vicki Cooper has once again proved herself to be the most sympathetic of editors.

Faith Evans began improving my French in the winter of 1962 'sous le ciel de Paris'. She has been doing so – and much else besides – ever since.

\*

An earlier version of “‘Peacocks and Pearls’: Oscar Wilde and Sarah Bernhardt” was delivered at the ‘1890s’ Conference at the University of Newcastle in 2001. Thanks to Professor John Batchelor for inviting me to speak.

I am grateful to the editors and publishers of the following for permission to reprint material:

‘Rachel’s “terrible beauty”: an actress among the novelists’ in *English Literary History* (Johns Hopkins University Press), vol. 51, Winter 1984, pp. 771–93.

‘Memories of Plessy: Henry James restages the past’ in *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 81–101.

Cambridge University Press  
0521843006 - The French Actress and her English Audience  
John Stokes  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

x

*Acknowledgements*

'Déjazet/déjà vu' in *Women and Theatre*, Occasional Papers 3, 1996, pp. 30–52.

'The modernity of Aimée Desclée' in *New Theatre Quarterly* (Cambridge University Press), vol. 6, no. 24, November 1990, pp. 365–78.

'"A kind of beauty": Réjane in London' in *Themes in Drama* (Cambridge University Press), vol. 6, 1984, pp. 97–119.

Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 are reproduced by permission of V&A Images / Victoria and Albert Museum; figures 1, 7 and 14 by permission of the British Library; figures 6, 10, 15, 16 and 20 by permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; figures 13, 18 and 19 by permission of the Mander and Mitchensen Theatre Collection; figure 17 by permission of the Bettmann Archive, Corbis.